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The Story of Rural School Consolidation in Indiana

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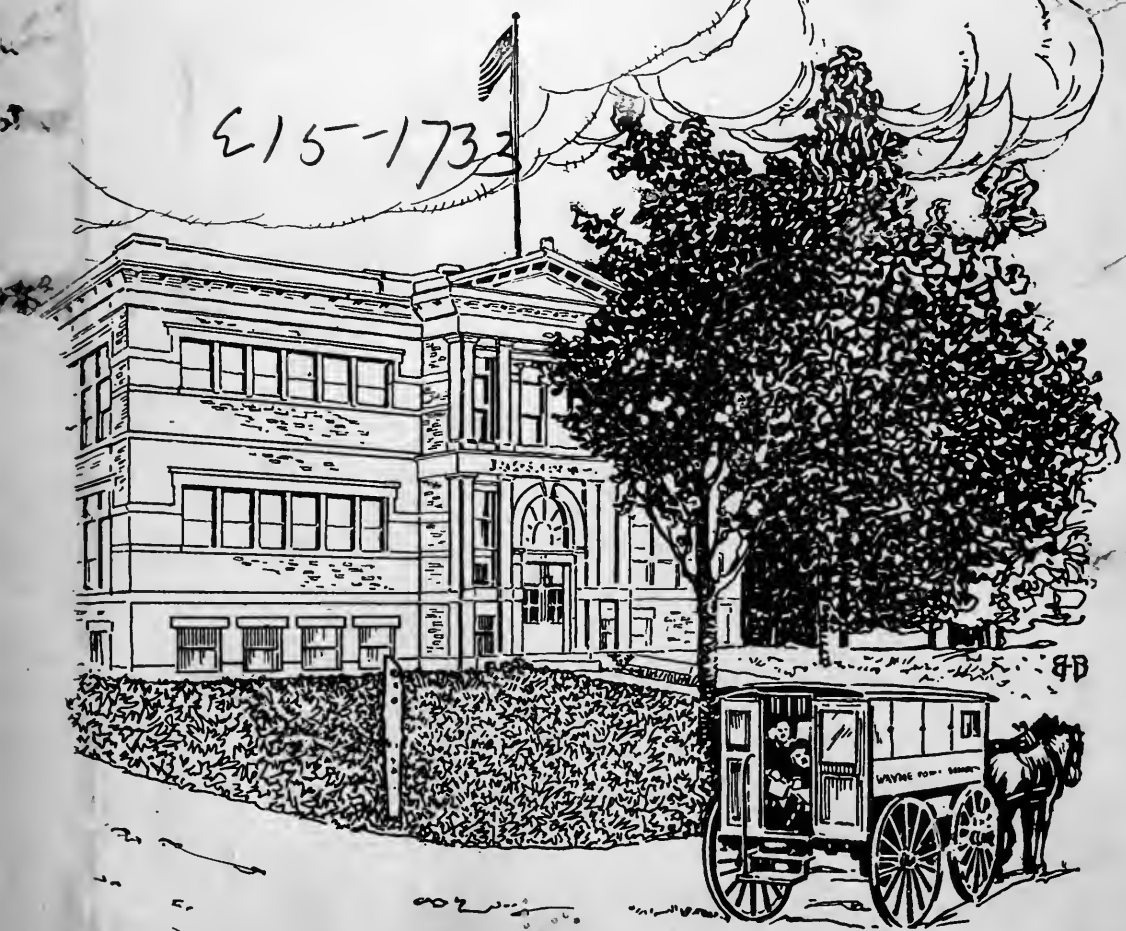

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How Indiana Has Divorced Mud From Mathematics

A REVIEW OF RURAL SCHOOL CONSOLIDATION IN INDIANA

The Romantic Phases of Indiana's Educational History

NO STATE in the American union has remained more continuously in the educational spotlight than Indiana.

The elements of this continuity have been both practical and romantic, but unquestionably the state's crowning educational achievement has been the movement to divorce Mud from Mathematics—to lift the rural school child from a mud-lathered highway into a comfortable conveyance and transport him to a modern, sanitary school house wherein he could have his mind on $7 \times 1 = 7$, instead of on the mud that made his boots a burden.

Indiana has been almost theatrical in her educational progress. In 1916 the Hoosier commonwealth will be one hundred years old. Within that century the state has marched from the tents of plebeianism into proud recognition as a center of learning. Posey county, now one of the strongest intellectual units in all Hoosierdom, once had a comedy rating as the abode of illiteracy. It was

the jester's favorite synonym for greenhorn. Today, with its splendid libraries, schools and army of college alumni, Posey county is in the front file of intellectual up-to-the-minuteness.

The Hoosier Schoolmaster of Old

Edward Eggleston, in "The Hoosier Schoolmaster," made the world both laugh and weep at his colorful unfolding of life and love in an Indiana school district. He wove romance around the three R's—readin', 'ritin' an' 'rithmetic—and pictured scenes that have not entirely vanished from American rural school life. The setting for his story was on a real stage in the hills of southern Indiana and his "Bud Means" in the person of Charles Grebe, a respected farmer of Jefferson county, still lives. He is a landmark left from the days when "The Hoosier Schoolmaster" had to be more pugilist than preceptor in order to hold his job.

The One-Room, One-Teacher District School

There has come marching out of this romantic past in Indiana's school history a new system that has attracted the attention of many educators. It is a system not based on filmy theory or the juggled "isms" of a dreamer. Indiana has set the seal of doom on the old one-room, one-teacher district school. It and its traditions have been hus-

Charles Grebe

The Original "Bud Means" in "The Hoosier Schoolmaster"

tled to the backlots of oblivion. In its stead has come the consolidated rural school with its slogan of better health, better society, better living conditions, better roads, better men and women—the crowning glory of better educational facilities.

The consolidated rural school is in line with American progress. It has come to bless the rural community as has the telephone, the rural mail carrier, the automobile and the electric motor in the barn.

Caleb Mills, a pioneer educator of Indiana, probably was the father of the consolidated school idea. As far back as 1856, when he was the state superintendent of public instruction, Mr. Mills put forward some suggestions looking to the abandonment of the one-room, one-teacher district school. He favored the larger units and drew the fire of much opposition. In his report for 1856 he presented his views.

"The superior wisdom and economy of the large over the small districts," said he, "become apparent on a fair exhibit and impartial comparison of their legitimate results. A township of thirty-six square miles may be divided into districts of two miles square, as many of them really are. Thus carved, it presents nine cozy, quasi corporations with a corresponding number of children, often so small as to forbid the establishment of a school, or, if established, so insignificant as to be-

little the enterprise and leave an unfavorable impression of its real character and consequence on the public mind. These nine schools, enfeebled by their numerical poverty, languish, droop and become so attenuated that it is difficult to ascertain whether there is any literary life and activity in either teachers or taught. It is a very natural conclusion that is often reached and acted on by trustees, that the schools are too small to justify the employment of first-class teachers and therefore an inferior grade is sought and installed in these centers of literature and science to engineer their charge through the sublime mysteries of their own ignorance, put in the time and obtain a certified claim to a portion of the public funds. A more legitimate conclusion from given premises was never reached than that small districts insure small and ill-furnished structures, short terms, incompetent teachers and corresponding instruction, lifeless schools and unawakened intellects."

No stronger indictment of the so-called "old-fashioned deestrick school" was ever penned and, singularly enough, although written nearly sixty years ago, it finds basis today in the unprogressive sections of many states. Indiana still has a few districts that balk at the bigger, better idea, but it will be shown here that the state has made good use of the message of the pioneer educator, Mr. Mills. It was his theory that one good schoolhouse was worth a half dozen inferior ones, and he measured teachers by the same standard. He

Along the Gloomy Trail Between Home and School

A scene that will revive memories in those who have trudged the long, weary miles to and from school. But how many would go back to "The Old Days" and encounter again the bleak winds, the snows and rains they once faced in the name of Education.

The School Hack—An Educational Blessing

Consolidation of rural district schools in Indiana made necessary the school hack. That meant a demand for better roads. Better roads helped the rural mail carrier and the farmer as well as the school children. Therefore the school hack is a community blessing and a welcome boon to children who had to plod muddy roads to school.

believed that it was economy, too, to pay one good teacher well that the pupils might be well taught. Indiana is proving his sixty-years-old theories today.

The Beginning of School Consolidation in Indiana

Rural school consolidation in Indiana is based on the effectiveness of three laws. The first, known as the compulsory education law, was passed by the Indiana legislature in 1899. Among its provisions was a clause that authorized township trustees to pay for the transportation of every child living two or more miles from the nearest public school. This erased the last excuse of parents who neglected the education of their children on the alibi of distance. The second effective law came in 1901, a statute requiring township trustees to abandon schools with an attendance of fewer than twelve pulpils and pay for their transportation to another school. The law also gave the trustee the privilege of abandoning a school whose attendance was between twelve and fifteen, if, in his opinion, better results would be obtained through consolidation. The legislature, in 1907, passed another law that made it mandatory for trustees to provide transportation for all children attending consolidated elementary schools.

In the face of much opposition by tradition-mongers, the school authorities of Indiana proceeded to put these legislative enactments into effect for the betterment of the rural school system. Trustees who took advantage of the laws and succeeded in abandoning poorly attended schools soon found that the combined schools did better work and that there was greater interest displayed by both teachers and pupils. There developed keen competition between classes and classmen. The smart child from the abandoned school injected new ginger into the star of the augmented school. The teachers caught the spirit of competition and began striving to make both classes and pupils excel those in the next room. The humdrumness of pedagogical toil vanished. The township trustees threw back their shoulders and pointed with pride to the new achievements and the patrons had to admit that a radical change for the better had come over schools and homes.

Trustees in other townships heard the boasts of the trustees who had successfully effected consolidation of their weaker schools. Then they, too, began "feeling out" their patrons for a similar experiment. But, by this time, word had spread over the rest of the county that Blue Lick and Washington townships were "putting on airs" with some new-fangled ideas that would abolish the old district school down near the crossroads. Instantly the "antis" began tuning up their wails of opposition.

"If you move the school away it will decrease the value of my farm," whined Mr. Dollars-above-all-else.

"The district school was good enough for me and it's good enough for my children," wailed Mrs. Let-well-enough-alone.

"I don't want my children jammed into hacks and taken so far from home," said Mrs. Anything-for-an-excuse.

"The roads would be too bad for the hacks to run in winter and we're too heavily taxed now to put any more money in roads," was the unanimous protest of the unprogressive element.

"It would be unhealthy and a bad moral thing to have our children crowded so closely together in hacks," the army of pessimists gave out as their chief point in opposition to the plan.

And the latter objection might have been well taken if the township trustee were a man deficient in personal standards. But it has been Indiana's experience that the great majority of trustees take pride in the employment of high-class hackmen and in the purchase of warm, comfortable, well-windowed and well-ventilated conveyances that make it possible for the hackman to observe at all times the conduct of his passengers. The other points in opposition to rural school consolidation have been proved untenable and not worthy of serious consideration.

The man who opposed school consolidation because he feared the abandonment of the crossroads school near his farm would depreciate his land values, has found that, instead of depreciating, they really have increased. Instead of affecting him adversely he has found that the bigger, better school has increased land prices throughout the township. The better school bettered general living conditions, enhanced pride in homes and outbuildings, produced demands for better roads and, with better roads, increased the worth of all farm property.

Some Experiences in Consolidation

Probably the most effective work for school consolidation in Indiana has been done by parents who wished their children to enjoy educational advantages superior to those offered by the one-room district school. These progressives arranged to send their children to the nearby towns where the elementary grades were better taught and there was the additional advantage of a high school. This situation was well illustrated in Jackson township, Carroll county, in 1900, the year after Indiana's compulsory education law was passed. The trustee of Jackson townshp interviewed his patrons on the subject of consolidating several weak schools. But opposition developed with such force that he was compelled to retreat and continue the old system.

A Picture That Reflects Educational Progress

Wea High School, Tippecanoe County, Indiana

This photograph tells its own story It is typical of the results obtained through rural school consolidation in Indiana. The children of Wea Township enjoy all of the educational facilities that are accorded the children in the towns and cities, including complete courses through the grades and the high school. The photograph also illustrates with fine emphasis the value of having a large attendance, giving opportunity for large classes and the benefits of individual and class competition.

Several patrons who had favored consolidation decided to obtain better school facilities for their children by sending them to Camden and Flora, nearby towns. They paid the transportation bills themselves and provided for other expenses incidental to the change. The result of the experiment was that their children displayed new interest in their studies and refused to return to the old one-room, one-teacher style of education. In Camden and Flora they enjoyed study and recitation because of the larger classes and the competition for merit. They became the envy of the other rural children because they "went to town to school." The result was that there soon spread over Carroll county a wave of juvenile discontent that proved effective in creating friends for the consolidated school movement. All of the children wanted town methods applied to country schools. The result was that Carroll county became a progressive educational center.

Carroll county's experience has been practically the same as that of every other of the ninety-two counties in Indiana. Prejudice against the newer ideas in education seemed, at first, an insurmountable barricade, but steady, logical preaching of the gospel of centralization has had such good effect that Indiana has already been able to abandon 1,963 school districts and center them in a total of 665 consolidated schools, a gain of 239 consolidated schools in the last five years.

The Advent of the Trained Teacher

Under the old one-room system the teacher's range ran from the A B C's to the surrender of Cornwallis or a review of the natural resources of Abyssinia. For hearing from fifteen to twenty classes a day the teacher received an average daily wage of $2.76. But, with the wholesale abandonment of district schools in Indiana, the trustees found themselves possessed of available funds for the employment of a higher grade of trained teachers. The consolidated schools demanded greater pedagogical skill and, naturally, the well-equipped teacher commanded more pay. The average per diem of school teachers has now reached $3.37 and the township trustees pronounce every cent of the increase a good investment in real efficiency.

The great need of the consolidated schools, with their enlarged classes, their broadened course of study and keener class competition, was for better teachers and Indiana's school trustees went out and got them. The result is that, today, Indiana is getting real money value and great educational good out of better schools and better teachers.

One of the notable changes in the school life of Indiana has been that the teachers have come to realize that their business is, in reality, a profession and they strive to increase their scope and general efficiency.

The following statistics, compiled in the office of the state superintendent of public instruction, tell an interesting story of the developments in school consolidation in Indiana:

	1910.	1914.
Number consolidated elementary schools	160	290
Number consolidated high schools	31	36
Number consolidated combined elementary and high schools	235	339
Total number consolidated schools	426	665
Number of pupils transported to consolidated schools	10,051	26,403
Total cost of transportation	$155,390	$491,265
Average cost of transportation per pupil transported	$ 19.66	19.63
Number of pupils enrolled in consolidated schools	29,215	73,404
Percentage of the total number of pupils enrolled in all rural schools in consolidated schools	24½%	35 9/10%
Percentage of the enrollment in consolidated schools in the high school	17%	22¼%
Number of abandoned schools reopened this year		38
Number of abandoned schools reopened during the past five years		194
Number of schools (not consolidated) abondoned this year		210
Number of schools (not consolidated) abandoned during the past five years		916
Total number of abandoned school districts in the State at the present time		1,963
Total number of district schools at the present time		5,635
Average number of pupils per teacher in consolidated schools		28
Average number of pupils per teacher in all other rural schools		22
Average tuition cost per pupil in consolidated schools		$18.45
Average tuition cost per pupil in all other rural schools		$18.00
Average total cost per pupil in consolidated schools		$25.64
Average total cost in all other rural schools		$22.71
Average daily wage of teachers in consolidated schools		$3.37
Average daily wage of teachers in all other rural schools		$2.76

School Architecture

Another important factor in the argument for school consolidation has been found in the reduced cost of maintenance. Since the movement was begun, fifteen years ago, keen competition has developed among the architects of Indiana for the production of model school buildings that would meet all modern requirements as to safety and sanitation and, at the same time, keep constantly in mind economy of upkeep. The rivalry has been so intensely maintained that Indiana today boasts of possessing some of the most complete school buildings in the country, notable particularly for upkeep that can be stated in a few brief items, such as the painting of exposed woods, janitor's hire and the occasional repairs to furnace or plumbing. The equipment for modern schoolrooms is now so sturdily built that it requires little attention. The bill of maintenance for a well-constructed building of from four to eight rooms has been found to be much lower than the expense accounts charged against the one-room frame structures of the old-fashioned type, subject forever to leaking roofs, rattling windows and smoking stoves.

The modern fireproof school building, such as ornaments so many rural districts of Indiana today, has permanent roofing, metal window casings, the flush system of closets, hot air or steam heat and a ventilating system that prevents the

schoolroom from smelling like a wet horse blanket on a rainy day. Sanitary drinking fountains have supplanted the old germ-prolific water bucket over by the window. Modern practice, too, has provided that light enter the schoolroom over the left shoulder of the pupils, thus saving them from reading or writing in nerve-wrecking shadows.

The newer school architecture has added two other delights to the lives of teachers, pupils and patrons—the auditorium and a serviceable basement. The auditorium, frequently provided for by the use of collapsible doors that throw from two to four rooms together, has become the public gathering place for the community. There the school's social and literary functions are held. The patrons use it for farmers' institutes, road meetings, Sunday-school conventions and other worthy purposes.

The schoolhouse basement is of incalculable benefit to the community, since advanced ideas in education have made it more than a coal hole and a repository for all the trash and junk that accumulates during the school year. Instead of being a catch-all, the basement now serves as the workshop for the boys who have adopted vocational training as a part of their school work. The girls, too, utilize the basement for their sewing and cooking rooms. The vocational training departments of the consolidated schools have proved

Furniture Made by Youthful Craftsmen

Vocational training has been introduced in Indiana's consolidated schools and the result is here shown. The articles exhibited were made in home and school workshops by boy students.

A Needlework Exhibit in a Rural School

Indiana's school girls are being prepared for future usefulness in the home through the agency of sewing classes and instruction in domestic science. The photograph here shown is of needlework done in a consolidated school.

popular innovations and, it is believed, stand largely responsible for the increased interest in general school work. Children who once desired to discontinue study at the close of the sixth grade now seek to continue through both the grades and high school. This is one of the answers for the largely increased attendance in Indiana's rural schools. The study of scientific agriculture has taken strong hold.

An admirable result has been had in the vocational training departments. It has been found that the boys, in studying and working at the trades in school, carry their newly-discovered skill home and use it with good effect around the house and barn. They want to repair everything that is in any way imperfect. Naturally the parents, the hired hands and the grown-up brothers catch the spirit of interest and help place the neglected machinery and buildings back on a working basis.

The girls, with their sewing and cooking classes, also have worked some effective reforms. Their experiments in domestic science are carried home and the mothers, at first doubtful because of previous prejudice, soon find themselves interested in the newer ideas of household economics and willingly set aside the old humdrum methods of home maintenance. The result is that the whole atmosphere of the place is sweetened and life takes on a brighter glow.

The Banishing of Prejudice

Of course prejudice, ever present when a new idea is born, made the early days of school consolidation in Indiana anything but cheerful for its advocates. The proposal to teach the children scientific farming was scoffed at. Now the fathers sit at home on winter nights and take delight in "going over the lessons" with the children, not only to help them but to absorb some of the education themselves.

The consolidated school has become the social, musical and literary center of many communities. The increased number of pupils has meant an increased number of parents interested in the general welfare of the school and the community. The result has been the organization of home development clubs, literary societies and choral unions in which the parents, teachers and pupils all have deep interest. They make the school auditorium their gathering place on all public occasions, inasmuch as it has greater capacity than most of the rural churches and, besides, it belongs to all of them without question of age, sex or creed.

No suggestion would be voted down with speedier unanimity in most of Indiana's townships than a return to the old system of education. Once the consolidated school is established it immediately proves its worth. Randolph county is in

good point as an object lesson of its popularity. A requirement in Indiana is that the township trustee retain possession of the old district school for two years in order to give the patrons time to fully consider the merits of consolidation. If, in that time, there was dissatisfaction with the new system, the patrons could then order the reopening of the old school. Otherwise, at the end of two years, the old building would be sold. Randolph county's record has been this: of ninety-one district schools abandoned only nineteen have been abandoned for lack of attendance, the remaining seventy-two having been closed by petition of the patrons. Not one of the abandoned schools that has been transferred to consolidated schools has been reopened. Throughout the state, in many instances, schools reopened have again been abandoned for consolidation, the patrons finding, after a second test, that consolidation afforded superior facilities and delivered better results.

The inefficiency of the old system is best illustrated by figures in the report of the state superintendent of public instruction for 1900. In that year there were 108 schools in Indiana with an average daily attendance of five pupils; 487 with an attendance of between five and ten pupils; 1,253 with an enrollment of between ten and fifteen pupils, and 2,332 that had between fifteen and twenty pupils. These figures disclose the costliness of maintaining the old crossroads school.

Athletics Popular in the Country

An Apparatus-Equipped School Playground

Athletics now are an important factor in rural school life. Apparatus that serves to develop muscle and make youth strong and healthy is becoming a part of all well regulated rural schools and is helping to keep the boys at home on the farm instead of running away to the cities.

Making Mind and Body Healthy Through Exercise

Through the agency of well-trained teachers the children of the rural schools of Indiana are being taught "how to play." The games they play provide both physical and mental exercise as they require both speed and quick thought. The picture shows a modern game in the process of execution.

Athletics in the Country School

The consolidated school has injected a new element into rural life in Indiana—athletics. The country boy used to be content with an occasional game of ball or pitching horseshoes. Today, through the increased number of boys attending the consolidated schools, they have base ball, foot ball, basket ball, track meets and all of the open-air thrills that Mr. Young America longs for. They participate in inter-township and inter-county track meets and Indiana has an annual high school field meet that is one of the year's big athletic events. The result is youth at his physical best. Athletics in the rural school has had a marked influence in checking the flow of the human tide toward the cities. The country boys are beginning to realize that, at home, they have practically every advantage known to the city youth and, as added capital, the wonderful effects of a life in the open.

Boyhood is not the only athletic beneficiary in rural school life. The girls, too, go in for basket ball and for gymnastic exercises that can be enjoyed in the school.

It has been found that backward pupils, through the agency of athletics, music and other diversions, have been brought to enjoy quickened pulses and enlivened mentality.

The Consolidated School and Good Roads

The consolidated school is a comumnity pride builder. Farmers who had opposed good roads and displayed their general lack of pride in the appearance of their houses and barns have been converted through the advent of the enlarged rural school. First of all the school needed good roads in order that the hacks might operate in all kinds of weather. The rural mail carrier also made his demand for better roads. The big, new consolidated school building looked like a diamond in a sea of mud. The roads simply had to be improved.

The question of improved highways edged its way into all rural conversations. Somehow it crept in where two or more farmers were gathered together at the village store, around the smithy or before and after church. Stories of how the school hack stuck in the mud burned their way into the very conscience of the community. Something had to be done. Then came the good roads meetings at the new schoolhouse. The result of the agitation has been that today Indiana is at the high tide of good roads building.

The improved roads and the new schoolhouse were pointed to with pride. Then the farmers decided that their homes and barns didn't fit into the picture and, in almost every community, a

general improvement of living conditions resulted. Men and women who had said that the district school was good enough for them and should be good enough for their children came to the conclusion that nothing was too good for a community that had energy enough to seek the better things of life.

The improvement of the highways has completely altered the early experiences of the township trustees and the hackmen who convey the children to and from school. With good roads the hackmen are able to run their hacks on a schedule like that used by the railroads. Mothers know that the hack will be along at 8:11 a. m. and they have the children ready. The teachers know that the hack will arrive at the school at 8:45 o'clock and they are there, ready for the day's work. Hackmen are held responsible for delays and the entire order of the day's school business is carried on systematically. Good roads made punctuality possible.

Whitley county turned in a good illustration of the value of the hack as a money saver. In one school a teacher received $36 a month for seven months' service, making a total of $252 for the term. Added to this sum was the expense of school maintenance, amounting to $40, making the total expenditure for the year $292. When consolidation was effected with another school it cost the township $140 per term to transport the pupils

of the abandoned school to the consolidated school. This was for a period of 140 days, the hackman receiving $1 a day for his services. Of course that was an extremely low price for hack hire, but the difference between $292 for maintaining the old school and $140 for hack hire gave the trustee's bank account a return on the public's side of the ledger amounting to $152. It will be seen that the trustee was thus enabled to put more money into his teachers' salary fund and therefore secure a better quality of instructors for the children of his township. The saving also enabled him to keep the consolidated school open for a longer term, thus rendering the community increased educational good.

When school consolidation was begun in Indiana the children were transported to school in conveyances supplied by their parents, the trustee paying a fixed sum for the service. This was found unsatisfactory and the use of the hack followed. It now is an interesting sight to see the long row of hacks in front of a consolidated school awaiting the dismissal of the children. Then the youngsters come trooping out, each to his own hack and soon they are on the homeward journey, happy, contented and full of song, instead of plowing their weary way along muddy roads. The hacks go from two to five miles and, on good roads, are able to make the distance in a comparatively short time.

A Class in Domestic Science

The teaching of domestic science in the rural schools was met, at first, with much opposition from mothers who believed in "the old-fashioned way of keeping house." That opposition is vanishing and mothers are realizing the benefits of a system that makes good cooks and good housekeepers of their daughters.

Under the new system the children enjoy the longer terms of school and there is not the hurried exit when the sixth grade is reached. Instead, the desire is to stay through the grades and enjoy the educational benefits provided by the high schools that have become such important factors in the modern rural consolidated school.

That transportation is popular with the school children has been illustrated in many ways, principally by their refusal to even discuss a return to the old walk-to-school plan. In Randolph county a vote was taken on the question in three consolidated schools and only one child in one hundred opposed the hack as a means for getting to and from school. The one objector, however, did not ride upon the school hack and therefore did not speak from experience.

Some Points in Conclusion

School consolidation in Indiana has impressed its permanent good in practically every section of the state and is moving steadily toward battering down every remaining prejudice against it. The new system has moved city school facilities out to meet the country boy and girl coming to town. They do not have to come to town now for the full enjoyment of what is due them—an education equal to the best provided for the children of the cities. The general result has been good for every-

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body in the family, from the ba[illegible] father dozing by the fire. The baby has life's sweetest opportunity, that of having good education facilities, ahead of it. Grandfather can only look back on those romantic, yet impractical, days when he thought the district school with its twenty pupils and as many classes was "good enough" for the American child. But "good enough" has passed out of Indiana's curriculum. The call today is for the best there is in life for the school and home.

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